

The Treasures of the Spirit

5 June 2022

Pentecost

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Acts 2.1-21

Romans 8.14-17

John 14.8-17

Our National Treasure

I hope you have been enjoying this long weekend of celebration for Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee. There has been a feast of things to watch on the television and I hope a feast of things to eat, drink and enjoy with people dear to you.

There is a phrase 'A National Treasure'. This gets given of people who's been known to the folk of the United Kingdom over many years. Surely the greatest National Treasure is Her Majesty herself.

To have been so respected over such a period of time is truly remarkable. To consider the National Anthem 'God save our gracious Queen'; being saved for 70 years is quite an answer to prayer. So God approves too.

We live in one of the most prosperous countries in the world. Although it has to be said not everybody shares in it. Wealth is so often equated with material possessions. But although the Queen has fabulous wealth, she represents deeper treasures of life such as dignity, service and faithfulness.

Treasures of Kingdom

On many occasions Jesus would speak about having treasure in our lives. He was not shy about life having features of great value. Indeed through Jesus, God was in the business of bringing transformation so that human beings can be fully alive.

In his parables Jesus would describe the Kingdom of God as being like treasure found hidden in a field or being like a pearl of immense price. The Kingdom of God is fabulous and we should endeavour to receive it into our lives.

Jesus was just as keen to tell us that there would be distractions to captivate us. He said 'where your treasure is there will be your heart' (Matt 6.21). So choosing the correct treasure is crucial

Jesus had an understanding of the lavishness of God and that this richness was available to all. It led him into conflict with people who wanted a more controlled society. When Jesus mixed with those who were not respected and forgave those

whom people wanted to condemn he would be vilified by some people.

But Jesus was not distracted by these complaints. He continued to teach people to be wise and to find greater truths about life than they had discovered. He told people insights that sometimes contradicted the received wisdom.

In one way we see him as being spiritual and getting to the heart of what life is about. But this was not a spirituality simply to make people happy or to have activities that were a new religion. Jesus cared about the poor. He wanted people to have relationships they were truly reconciled. When Jesus spoke about love it included the enemy. truly a lasting challenge in our world of divisions, hostility and war.

Pentecost

Jesus ministry was not calmly delivering a new body of truth. He continually caught people off guard and scandalised them with his plans and ambition. When his disciples started to get the idea of what was going on he then told them it would end with his death. To his disciples this would be defeat but to Jesus it was the continual opening up of the purposes of God.

Jesus spoke of his resurrection which really nobody believed until it happened. Before his crucifixion Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit being given to the church to enable his ministry to continue. Yet following his ascension his disciples were hiding and fearful.

Today is the feast of Pentecost as we remember the Holy Spirit being given to the disciples. And that gift is for us too.

We are not a company of people to merely know things about Jesus or to keep some religious traditions going. The knowledge is important. Scripture, prayer and sacraments are vital. But they are all to be means for the Holy Spirit to be at work amongst us and it is God's ambition for our lives to have a wonderful fruitfulness.

When Saint Paul was writing to encourage his young companion Timothy he tells him to 'fan into flame the gift of God which is within you' (1 Timothy 1.6).

When Saint Paul wanted to describe what the Holy Spirit would bring to believers he gave this wonderful list that we know as the fruits of the spirit 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control' (Galatians 5.22,23).

Any one of these would be a treasure but Paul is saying there many gifts to receive from the Holy Spirit. No doubt the list is not exhaustive either.

Family Life

To have these four days of celebration is not simply about one person's life of service, however noble. Queen Elizabeth is the head of the royal family she symbolises British national life and indeed a Commonwealth of nations.

We live in an age of celebrity and so easily National Treasures can be regarded in isolation. But we live in a whole range of communities and God seeks for each of these to flourish.

Through the month of May St Mary's had a programme events to enable people to enjoy various dimensions of the people we live with. There was singing, music, dance, Bible, refreshments and picnic.

The invitation went to our parish and beyond and everybody was welcome to come to all things. However the support for the events was given largely by the community of people who were already involved. Parents supported their children as they performed. The folk who attended the music events were again largely familiar with who was going to play. Marvellous May illustrated how the community of St. Mary's is a federation of interests. Sometimes these overlaps. Sometimes the links are quite narrow even if highly valued.

The family of God

I think if I were to ask people what their greatest treasure is I imagine most people would say it is their family. I would certainly be saying that for myself.

In our Gospel reading Philip asks about faith in family terms. He asks 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied' (John 14.8) Phillip knows that Jesus has a close and intimate relationship with God. Philip is wanting faith to have a love that is warm and tangible.

In our reading from Romans, Saint Paul is very explicit about life with God having a family dimension. He speaks about being children of God, being adopted, calling God 'Abba, Father' and being heirs. The latter implies a great promise to be fulfilled. This family life is one that is greater than our natural experience.

I hope our experience of family life has been good but even so it won't be perfect. The love of God is the real thing. I had a friend who I trained with for the ordained ministry who said he wanted to know God as father because his own one fell so short. The love of God is not to be modelled on our experience. The love of God is demonstrated in the life of Jesus Christ and God sends his Holy Spirit to us to show us this true life.

In our lives we will have many treasures. They all point to great things, even the ones that have fallen short. So let us take what has inspired us and keep the ambition that there is a greater reality. By his Holy Spirit God intends us to receive truly good things.

True life

Some of these great gifts will come to us as individuals and we will have abilities and qualities special to ourselves. Some of these great gifts are about community and how we work together supporting each other and being strengthened by each other. All are led and enabled by the Holy Spirit. Even more, some of it will be a mystery because God is at work and we do not always see his purposes clearly.

When Saint Paul wrote about love in One Corinthians chapter thirteen he spoke about looking in a glass darkly. Much is revealed about our faith but there is still plenty to be discovered. The task is to be faithful and to love not because we know all of the answers now but because with God will produce a good harvest in his time.

In another place in the book of Romans Saint Paul said 'that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words (Roman 8.26). We are invited deeply into faith trusting that the way will be shown to us even if at the moment we cannot even find the words to describe what's going on.

On this feast of Pentecost let us be reminded of God's great desire to fill us with his spirit. Let our imagination be open to the great gifts he wishes to pour on his people. May we seek for this sense of the family of God grow as we understand a deeper sense of love which is beyond our natural experience.

We are people of faith, people of prayer and may we have the courage to say 'Come Holy Spirit'. God is more willing to give than we to ask and that the result will be treasurer now only in this world but also in the world to come.